

Muslim Heroes series – No. 13

MUHAMMAD BIN ABDUL WAHAB

The leading 12th century
religious and political reformer
of the Arabian Peninsula

Naima Sohaib

Translated by
Asma Farooq

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| Title of the Book: | Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab |
| Author: | Naima Sohaib |
| English Translator: | Asma Farooq |
| Quantity: | 1,000 |
| Price: | PRs50 |
| Edition: | 1 st |
| Date: | March 2013 |

Published in Pakistan by Sahar Publishers.

English translation of the Original Urdu version “**Tareekh-e-Islam ki Azeem Shakhsiat**” by Naima Sohaib, published May 2005, November 2006, March 2009 and October 2012.

Distributors:

Da’wah Books

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Karachi

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Foreword

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

This booklet is thirteenth in a series, translated from a book compiled on Muslim heroes by my dear friend Naima Sohaib. The selection includes Muslim scholars, philosophers, reformers and military generals. The book tells us about those unique individuals who selflessly worked for the cause of Islam. I hope that Muslims today will find these stories a source of inspiration.

This book is about Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab who is one of the greatest reformers that history has seen. This fearless man appeared in the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century A.D. at a time when the Islamic world was facing one of its darkest times. Innovations in religion, superstitions, grave worship and all kinds of deviations had spread amongst the people. There was severe moral degradation and religion had been reduced to meaningless rituals.

In this dark hour, Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab decided to call people back to the right path; the path shown by the Quran and Sunnah. His mission was to eliminate Shirk (polytheism) from the Islamic world – the most abominable and unforgiveable sin in Islam.

There has always been a lot of false propaganda about his movement. He made an incredible contribution in purging the society of the evils it was involved in.

May Allah reward Naima for her constant encouragement, Sohaib for patiently editing this piece of work and Farooq Saeed, my husband, for his continuous support.

Asma Farooq

Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab

The 12th century leader who played a religious and political role in reviving Islam in the Arabian Peninsula

Introduction

His name was Muhammad and his title was Sheikh ul Islam. His lineage is: Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab bin Sulaiman.

Sheikh's lineage can be traced back to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) from the tribe Ilyas of Banu Tamim. His paternal grandfather was the most learned man in the city of Ainiya and hence was held in great esteem in the whole of Najd. Apart from being a great scholar he was also blessed with bravery, generosity and good character. Since he was a highly respected and non-controversial personality his followers ranged from the common man to the ruling classes. He was consulted whenever there was need for reconciliation or to settle disputes between opponents.

After his death his sons Sheikh Abdul Wahab and Sheikh Ibrahim carried on with his legacy of teaching and scholarly pursuit. In fact, Sheikh Abdul Wahab (Muhammad's father) became so famous that he was given the position of 'Raees ul Ulama' (chief scholar). He was reputed in the fields of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Hadith, Tafseer (interpretation of the Quran), Quran sciences and Arabic literature. His Fatawa (Islamic rulings) were based on the Hanbali school of thought. In addition to the mosque his house would also be occupied with his students. A large gathering which included people from

every stratum of society could be seen visiting his house. Even the ruler of Ainiya and his sons would also seek his advice.

Birth

Sheikh Abdul Wahab's son Muhammad was born in 1115 A.H. (1703 A.D.). He was a capable and gifted child whom destiny would guide him to great achievements.

Childhood, Education and Upbringing

The scholarly background and noble character of the household that he was born into left a great impact on Muhammad's personality. From an early age he was distinguished for his intelligence and memory. He was ten when he finished memorizing the Holy Quran. Since there were no Arabic schools in Ainiya, children had to be sent to other cities to acquire education. However, Muhammad did not need to do this as his house was the best centre of learning. He was taught the books of Hanbali school of Fiqh by his father. He studied numerous books of Hadith and Tafseer during his childhood. He would make an extra effort to memorize Ahadith. His father would be very happy with his promising son's intelligence. He used to say that whilst teaching Muhammad he would himself benefit from his son's vast knowledge and intelligence. Despite his young age his father would ask him to lead the prayers. Muhammad got married at a tender age and was only twenty years old when people started to acknowledge him as a scholar.

Start of his Mission

From an early age Muhammad had a great inclination towards enjoining good and forbidding evil. His deep study of Quran and Hadith had made him realize that the society he was living in was by no means conforming to Allah's will. In reality it was built on the foundations of ignorance and had nothing left in it except Shirk, religious innovation and senseless practices. There

was turmoil and discord in every sphere of life. He made a firm resolve to rectify the situation. He would raise his voice whenever he would see anything being done against the rules of Islamic Shariah (Islamic law). When he approached various scholars in this regard, only a few would reluctantly give him their support. The majority of the scholars opposed him relentlessly and created uproar against his efforts. Apart from his family and a few followers the whole city stood against him. In the face of this opposition his father decided to move from Ainiya. Thus in 1139 A.H. accompanied by his family and followers his father left for Harimela.

Muhammad was totally against this migration. He did not accompany his father and singlehandedly continued the task of calling people to the truth in Ainiya. The scholars, rulers and the common public could not silence him. Muhammad who was around 24 or 25 years old at that time would walk through the streets and markets with a handful of followers and call people towards Tawheed (monotheism). He would be surrounded by a massive crowd who would taunt, slander and throw accusations at him and eventually resort to abusive language. This state of affairs continued till Muhammad was convinced that his efforts were fruitless and it was time to move on. He made an intention to go to the holy cities of Makkah and Madina for the performance of Hajj and at the same time seek the advice of the scholars over there and acquire further knowledge in their company.

Journey of Hajj and Learning in Hejaz

In Makkah he met local scholars as well as scholars from all over the world who were visiting Makkah for the purpose of Hajj. He presented the basic objectives of his mission to the respected scholars who after some discussions gave him a positive response and appreciated his work. This encouragement and the firm belief that he was on the right path made him even more determined.

After performing Hajj, Muhammad came to Madina where he started attending the study circles of the esteemed scholar Abdullah bin Ibrahim bin Saif. During their meeting he informed Sheikh Ibne Saif about his mission and all what he had gone through. Sheikh was very pleased and took him to meet Sheikh Muhammad Hayat Sindhi who was a highly respected scholar of Hadith and Sunnah in Madina. At this point in time, news of his mission had reached many scholars who offered their support to remove religious innovations and senseless practices from the society.

During this whole period, Muhammad continued to benefit from the company of scholars. He mastered the field of Hadith and received certification from his teachers. In addition, he was also given permission to teach the books of the Hanbali school of thought.

During his stay in Hejaz, Sheikh Muhammad realized that even though these two cities were a reflection of true Islamic spirit, yet people in their surrounding areas were engaged in acts that were in total violation of the Islamic Shariah. Once whilst standing in front of the Prophet's grave he observed a crowd of people supplicating facing the Holy Prophet's (SAW) grave. He could not restrain himself when he saw people behaving in this ignorant manner. He explained to them in detail the correct manner of visiting the holy grave and its importance in Shariah. In the meantime his teacher Allama Sindhi arrived over there. He apprised the esteemed scholar of the situation and enquired his opinion regarding these practices. In answer to his query Allama Sindhi recited the following verse of the Holy Quran:

“Verily what these people are following is going to be destroyed. And all that they are doing is in vain” (7:139)

There was never an oversight on his part in fulfilling the mission he had undertaken of enjoining good and forbidding evil. To the extent that he fulfilled this duty in front of the

Prophet's grave even in the presence of his teacher. On his departure from Madina he addressed his teachers, friends and supporters and once again reiterated his resolve to take every possible action against polytheism and religious innovations. Everyone prayed for the success of his mission and he embarked upon his journey.

Conditions During his Time

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab was a contemporary of Shah Waliullah Dehlavi. Let us briefly take a look at the conditions prevailing in Arabia at that time specifically in the area of Najd.

In the 12th century Arabia like other Muslim countries came under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had given internal independence to all the states under their control. The prevailing political and religious condition of each state was taken into account before choosing a representative from the local people to represent the Ottomans. The Turks who had great respect and regard for the Arabs, would try their best not to interfere in the internal matters of Hejaz and Najd. In Hejaz (Makkah, Madina and its neighboring areas) the representative of the Ottomans was known as 'Ameer-e-Hejaz' or 'Sharif-e-Makkah' and was from the descendants of the Holy Prophet (SAW). There were constants feuds within the Sharif family for this coveted position but the Ottomans would choose to ignore these matters.

These conditions were not just confined to Hejaz but were prevalent in the adjoining area of Najd too. There were no geographical boundaries marked out in these areas. The areas of the city of Al Ariz and Al Qaseem held great importance. Sheikh's place of birth Ainiya and the center of his mission, Dariya, were located in Al Ariz (whose famous city Riyadh is still the Saudi capital). This area was considered the heart of Najd. However, the absence of political unity and the division

of the area into many small states led to constant fighting over power among the tribes which resulted in civil war. There was complete political chaos in the entire area of Najd.

In the 12th century Najd had become a centre of misguidance and unislamic practices. People had deviated from the basic teachings of Islam like Tawheed and from the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to the extent that all kinds of pre Islamic practices had become a way of life. It was as if Islam had become a combination of Shirk, idolatry, religious innovation and senseless practices and traditions. Basic beliefs had changed; the practices that Islam had come to abolish had become the very foundations of the religion practiced there. People would pray to trees, rocks and graves and sacrifice animals in their name. The graves of the companions of the Prophet Zayd bin Khattab (RA) and Zarar bin Azor (RA) had become an exhibition ground for religious innovations.

There was a famous date tree by the name of 'Fahhal' in the town of AlFada. Men and women would travel great distances to pay homage and worship this tree. They would prostrate in front of it and relate their needs and wishes to it. Special prayers would be made to cure sickness and for the attainment of marriage proposals. Women would pray to it to grant them a child. The branches of the tree were not visible because they were covered with ropes and strings, each signifying the wishes of the people.

Similarly, there was a cave in the hills of Dariya which pilgrims would throng. It was claimed that this was the grave of a girl named Bintul Ameer. People would circumambulate (Tawaf) around it and pray to it. The story behind this was that one day the girl was passing by this hill when she was harassed by a group of wicked young men. She prayed with such earnest that a stone split open to give her refuge. On this basis people believed that even after her death this extraordinary girl had powers to ward off evil.

In the area of Kharj a saint's grave was the centre of peoples' attention. The legend had it that the saint despite being blind would travel alone to faraway places. Even though he was very wealthy no one would rob him and no wild animal would harm him. After he passed away his grave became a place of veneration where people would engage in worship and present offerings.

This state of affairs was not confined to these areas but most parts of Najd were famous for a particular grave, shrine or mosque where polytheistic practices were rampant. Good and bad omens were taken from the flight of birds. For every little matter fortune tellers were consulted to find out what the future held. The followers of the famous Najdian oracle Ablaq Saadi belonging to the pre Islamic era had spread everywhere. They wanted to lead their lives according to their own will and be free from the constraints of Islam.

The social and political conditions of the people were as alarming as their religious affairs. Due to the absence of a central power, every city had become a separate unit. There was no communication between the towns and cities. Rulers were chosen on the basis of tribal affiliations and lineage. They would make decisions based on bias and prejudice instead of justice and fairness. The rich and powerful would use every tactic to defeat and humiliate the weak. Looting, unjustified killing and rape had become an everyday occurrence.

In these circumstances the criminal elements of society had full liberty to carry on their activities. People travelling through the forests of Najd were not safe as bands of robbers would hide in the clumps of trees and in caves and loot the trade convoys. Robberies and looting also occurred in broad daylight as there was no one to stop them. The absence of rule of law led to chaos and civil war everywhere. Consequently, peace and tranquility of the whole society was ruined.

The social customs of the people had become similar to those of the days of ignorance. There was a trend towards leading an animalistic way of life. In their free time people would sit in groups and relate tales, discuss current affairs and war stories. The educational institutions were practically nonexistent and mosques were deserted. There was no interest in acquiring knowledge. Turkish had replaced Arabic in the offices. It is not surprising that the morals of the people become depraved in such abominable conditions. Basic social and moral values that were given importance even in the days of ignorance had become redundant.

Daily occurrences of highway robberies and dacoities had devastated the economy. Import and export trade had come to a halt. The country was incapable of producing any grains itself. Unlawful occupation of the agricultural lands had demoralized the farmers to the extent that deeming their farming income insufficient, they joined the thieves and robbers. There was widespread famine in the country. Driven by hunger, the distressed public also resorted to unlawful ways to obtain food for themselves.

Masood Alam Nadwi in his famous book on Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab quotes an American writer Staddard who despite being a non-Muslim expresses his surprise and sorrow at the state of affairs in Arabia at that time. He says that “not only did they disregard the teachings of the Quran but also went against them – to the extent that even the two holy places (Makkah and Madina) became the centre of evil doings and Hajj which the Prophet (SAW) had declared obligatory had become debased because of the religious innovations. Essentially, Islam had perished. If Muhammad (SAW) returned to this world he would express his disgust at the way his followers had abandoned their faith and adopted idolatry”.

A New Start to his Mission and its Opposition

On his return from Hajj, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab went to Najd and then onwards to Basra. Here, he developed strong ties with Sheikh Muhammad Al Majmuae. In Basra things were no different to Najd. Polytheism had become deeply entrenched in their lives. Heedless of the consequences, Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab continued to preach people to refrain from indulging in these polytheistic practices. His endeavor was not well received and he began to face opposition. When he did not give up his cause, his enemies confiscated his books and belongings, beat him up and threw him out of the city.

Whilst travelling between Basra and the city of Zubair, Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Wahab fainted due to the intense summer heat. When he gained consciousness he was listless with hunger and thirst. Whilst he was praying to Allah to ease his difficulty he saw a man coming from the city of Zubair, who on seeing his state gave him water and took him home.

After resting for a few days over there he decided to travel to Syria. However, when he realized he had no means to undertake this journey he left for the city of Harimela where his father lived. There are two views regarding his father's reaction to his call during this time. The first is that he was an avid supporter of his ideology and remained so till the end. The other view is that his father stayed detached from his mission. Sheikh always kept the respect he held for his father in mind and even though his movement continued in Harimela, its pace remained slow.

One way to synthesize the above two viewpoints is that even though Sheikh's father agreed with his beliefs and philosophy, it was against his scholarly status and respect in society to have an open confrontation with anyone. Regardless of the situation, Sheikh was not the sort to stop calling people to what he believed was the truth. Consequently, in Harimela also his rival scholars and their followers became his worst enemies.

However, they did not take any action against him out of respect for his father. After his father's death in 1153 A.H. Sheikh's mission gained strength and he managed to influence a large number of young people in becoming acquainted with the message of Tawheed. On the other hand his opponents now had full freedom as his father was not alive to protect him anymore. Their persecutions against Sheikh Muhammad and his mission gained speed.

In Harimela two tribes belonging to the descendants of Raba'a had seized power at the same time. There was extreme hostility between the tribes and clashes were customary. Both the tribes supported criminals to fight against each other and no one was safe from their evil doings. When Sheikh raised his voice against them, they decided that killing him was the only solution. A few criminals tried to enter his house at night and hid in the shadow of the wall. At the same time a caravan was entering the city. When they saw the criminals they assumed that they were robbers and created a commotion. The criminals had no choice but to run away.

It was not long before Sheikh found out the whole truth. It was not safe for him to stay in Harimela anymore. Even after enduring all kinds of harassment and persecution, this embodiment of patience and determination was not willing to budge an inch from his mission. Once again he left Harimela for the sake of Allah and decided to go to Ainiya. After some correspondence with the ruler Sheikh realized that he was impressed with his mission and was willing to let him stay in Ainiya.

Migration to Ainiya and Change in Strategy

Sheikh had come to the conclusion that preaching pure Tawheed (monotheism) in a polytheistic society and reforming their centuries old moral degradation was not going to be an easy task. Sheikh was willing to endure all kinds of difficulties on his

own self, but he recognized that for any movement to grow conditions have to be favorable at least to the extent that its very existence is not threatened. If the government or ruling party is supportive, the objectives can be achieved easily and quickly. Therefore, after finding support in the ruler of Ainiya Usman bin Muammar, Sheikh decided to move there in order to focus completely on his mission.

On his arrival Sheikh was given a warm welcome by the ruler of Ainiya. After presenting his mission and clarifying the objectives, Sheikh asked him for his support. He said to Usman: “If you are willing to support La ilaha illallah, then come and join us. I am hopeful that Allah will make you victorious and you will gain control over Najd and its people”. Usman assured him of his support and arranged his marriage to his niece.

Once again Sheikh started his Dawah work with renewed fervor. Allah opened up the hearts of the residents of Ainiya for the truth and Sheikh made considerable progress in his mission. After verbal preaching he decided that now the time had come to take some practical measures to demolish the centers of religious innovation. The first thing he did was to burn down the trees that had gained sanctity in the hearts of the people. Sheikh invited the people on a specific day to witness the end of the tree that was deeply revered by them. At the prescribed time Sheikh came out himself and read the following verse of the Quran which the Prophet (SAW) had recited when he had demolished the idols in the Kaaba: “Truth has arrived and falsehood has perished; for falsehood is bound to perish.” (17:81). Sheikh followed the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and pulled out the tree from its roots. The general public waited to see what punishment would descend upon him in recompense for this great crime. However, when they saw that Sheikh and his followers remained unharmed, the spell of their blind faith got broken.

Zayd bin Khattab (RA), a companion of the Prophet (SAW) and

brother of Hazrat Umar (RA) had been martyred in the battle of Yamama. It was believed that his grave was in a place called Jabeela. Large numbers of people would visit the grave. They would consider it a source of blessing to rub their bodies against the grave and then sit for 'Aitekaf' (sitting in seclusion for the purpose of worship) in the same place. When Sheikh decided to demolish the grave, his followers and even Usman, the ruler of Ainiya, were hesitant. However, Sheikh had made up his mind. Ibne Bashir relates this incident. Sheikh addressed Usman in the following words: "Come, let's demolish this dome whose foundation is laid on falsehood and because of which people have strayed from the right path". Usman asked him to destroy it himself. Sheikh replied: "We face a threat from the people of Jabeela. They might attack us. Without your presence I cannot demolish it."

Usman agreed and marched towards the grave with 600 soldiers. The people of Jabeela had full intention of using force to stop them but when they saw Usman's preparation they yielded to him. Now Usman said to the Sheikh: "We cannot touch the dome". Sheikh himself took a hammer and leveled the dome to the ground. That night the ignorant people waited impatiently to see what affliction would descend upon the Sheikh after his unlawful action. The fact is that none can harm who Allah protects. The next day people were disappointed that nothing happened. However, this event renewed the faith of the weak and bolstered the courage of the righteous.

The recurrence of these incidents opened up people's eyes and they started believing in the Sheikh. The movement gained strength. People would travel from faraway places to meet the Sheikh and express interest in gaining knowledge. Usman assisted in providing food and lodging for the travelers and also fixed stipends for them. Sheikh urged Usman to revive the practice of congregational prayers. This was implemented to the extent that punishment was suggested for people not attending the prayers. Government officials were extorting all kinds of

taxes from the people. Sheikh abolished all illegal taxes and only allowed the collection of Zakah.

Expulsion from Ainiya and Attempted Murder

Sheikh was busy with his mission when an incident occurred that once again changed the tide of things. Masood Alam Nadvi relates this incident in the following words: "Some things are just meant to happen. A woman guilty of adultery came to the Sheikh and confessed her sin. After repeated cross questioning she would not budge from her confession. Sheikh was left with no choice but to order her stoning. Usman together with a group of Muslims carried out the punishment. The first person whose hand moved to pick up a stone was Usman".

This incident created quite a stir. How could people who were accustomed to sin and were involved in it day and night tolerate this? They immediately went to the ruler of Ahsa and informed him of the whole situation. The ruler was a very powerful man and held great pride in his authority. Since he was an immoral man the news of this incident angered him immensely. He wrote a letter to Usman (whose gardens were in Ahsa) warning him that either he should himself kill the Sheikh or force him to leave Ainiya and send him to Ahsa. He threatened that whatever Usman was getting from Ahsa would be stopped."

There are two views regarding the reaction from the ruler of Ainiya. According to one, when Sheikh saw that Usman did not have the power to fight the ruler of Ahsa he decided to leave the city. The other view states that Usman himself sent a message to the Sheikh to leave the city. After receiving this message Sheikh left the city and whilst travelling in the intense heat of the Arabian desert recited the following verse of the Quran: "And whoever fears Allah He will make for him a way out and will provide for him from where he does not expect." (65:2)

According to a tradition Usman ordered a soldier to follow the

Sheikh and later kill him. However, when he decided to kill him, he was overcome with such fear that he was unable to do so and had to run back to Ainiya.

Support from Ibne Saud and Sheikh's Popularity

After expulsion from Ainiya the Sheikh made a move towards Dariya. Mohammad bin Saud, the ruler of Dariya was a pious man and was known for his virtuous character. In Dariya Sheikh stayed at the house of Abdullah bin Swailam. Even though Abdullah was terrified, he was forced into giving refuge to the Sheikh because of the Arab tradition of hospitality. He was aware of the fate of the people who had protected the Sheikh in other places. As soon as news spread that Sheikh was in town, crowds of people gathered outside his house. Abdullah was scared that this news would soon reach the ruler of Dariya. Meanwhile, Sheikh started teaching the explanation of the Holy Quran and giving sermons. Some of his students mentioned about his arrival to Muhammad bin Saud's brother Sanyan and his wife Mawdha who was well known for her kindness, generosity and patronage of Islam. Mawdha was impressed by the Sheikh's knowledge and virtue. She informed her husband, the ruler of Dariya, of the situation and said "Allah has sent this great blessing for you. Go and support him. Your affairs in this world and the hereafter will be set right if you do so".

Muhammad bin Saud trusted his virtuous wife and taking her advice decided to meet the Sheikh. In this meeting Sheikh Muhammad gave a short speech on the important aspects of his mission, namely Tawheed, enjoining good and forbidding evil and Jihad. Muhammad bin Saud was very impressed by the Sheikh's sincerity and the simplicity of his mission. He said "O Sheikh! Without doubt this is the religion of Allah and his Prophet (SAW). I am ready to assist you, follow you and wage war against those who oppose Tawheed. But I have two conditions: One, if we help you and Allah gives us victory, you will not leave us. Two, you will not stop me from receiving a

fixed tax from the people of Dariya at the time of harvest.”

Sheikh replied instantly: “I accept the first condition. Bring your hand. From now on, your blood is my blood and attacking your honor is like attacking mine. As for the second condition, InshaAllah you will gain so much from your victories and war booty that even the thought of this tax will not come to your mind”.

In 1157 A.H. Ibne Saud took the oath of allegiance to the Sheikh. He resolved to enjoin good and forbid evil and to follow the path prescribed by the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).

Dariya was a small town in which majority of the population was illiterate. As soon as Ibne Saud swore allegiance to the Sheikh, people who were hesitant until now started showing up in great numbers to show their support to the Sheikh. People started studying the Quran; Sheikh would himself teach the holy book and Sunnah to the seekers of knowledge from morning to evening. Sheikh had left behind groups of his followers in every area he went. They were happy to hear that the mission had secured a base camp and started growing. One by one everyone started heading towards Dariya. Everything changed completely in Dariya. In a place where ignorance had spread far and wide, people started calling each other towards Allah and His prophet (SAW). Mosques started filling up and people started attending intellectual gatherings. The ruler of Ainiya, Usman, also came to the Sheikh and after pledging allegiance to him vowed to implement the laws of Shariah. The people of Harimela also took an oath of allegiance and thus Dawah work started with great zeal and fervor.

Key Points of Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's Call

Sheikh's mission was based on pure Tawheed and complete adherence to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The movement was started for the revival of these and Sheikh

managed to achieve his desired success. We should look at and understand the mission's key points in view of the religious and moral conditions of Najd and its surrounding areas.

1. Return to Pure Tawheed and its Pre-requisites

The main objective of the movement was the implementation of pure Tawheed in everyday life. The meaning of pure Tawheed is worshipping only one Allah without associating any partners with him. It is not permissible to pray to deities or ask them for help or seek their intercession. Similarly, it is against the Shariah of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to exaggerate the status of pious men, turn their graves into places of worship or believe that their intercession (and not one's good deeds) will save one on the Day of Judgment.

2. Visiting Graves

Sheikh taught people the correct manners of visiting graves. He made it clear that it is allowed, even desirable, in Islam to visit graves. However, a person visiting graves must remind himself that this world is temporary and just like everything perishes, he will also have to die and leave everything behind in this temporary abode. He should seek forgiveness from Allah for himself and the grave dwellers and then salutation should be sent to them according to the way the Prophet has taught us.

Making graves a place of carnival, building mosques on graves, kissing them, praying to the grave dwellers, circumambulating them, worshipping them, crying and screaming around them are all forbidden acts. Also, requesting the grave dwellers to remove difficulties, considering them benefactors who can fulfill our needs and wishes, sacrificing animals in their name and considering it an obligatory act like Hajj to circumambulate their graves are all acts of Shirk.

3. Tawassul-bil-Anbiya

Before clarifying the reality of Tawassul-bil-Anbiya, it is important to understand its meaning. The word Tawassul means to use a Waseelah (mediation) to reach or achieve something. The word Tawassul is used in three different ways:

- I. Seeking Waseelah or mediation through obedience of the Prophet (SAW). This is obligatory and without it our faith is incomplete.
- II. Using the Prophet's Waseelah in our supplications. This was possible only during the life of the Prophet (SAW) but after his departure from this world it is prohibited. However, it is possible to use the Waseelah of any living righteous man. During his caliphate Hazrat Umar (RA) whilst collectively supplicating for rain would state that "When we suffered from drought during the life of the Holy Prophet we would use his Waseelah and Allah would bless us with rain. Now after his death we take the Waseelah of his uncle Abbas (RA)". We learn from this that we are not allowed to make any deceased person, even prophets, a Waseelah in our supplications.
- III. The third Tawassul is when a person asks Allah to grant his supplications by repeatedly using the Waseelah of prophets and righteous people. There is no evidence of this in the Quran, Hadith or in the lives of the companions of the Holy Prophet. This is considered an act of Shirk which is totally prohibited in Islam. It was this Tawassul that was commonly practiced in the time of the Sheikh. He vehemently opposed this practice and appealed to the people to refrain from this act.

4. The Issue of Intercession (Shafa'at)

Intercession has always been a controversial issue. According to

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab intercession was a plea for forgiveness of one's sins. He believed firmly in the intercession to be offered by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on the Day of Judgment. However, in the light of clear verses of the Quran, his view was that no one will be able to intercede or place a recommendation without the permission of Allah. This is made clear in the following verse of the Quran: "Who is he that can intercede with him except with His permission?" (2:255). This means that the Prophet (SAW) will not be able to intercede without the permission of Allah and will be able to intercede only for the person for whom Allah gives permission.

According to authentic Ahadith, in addition to prophets and angels, righteous people will also be able to intercede with Allah's permission. However, it is not permissible to call upon any prophet, martyr, saint or angel for intercession using, for example, the following words: "O Muhammad, intercede for me" or "O Ali (RA) only you are my intercessor" or "O the virtuous, get my sins absolved". Also, it is not right to be convinced of intercession to such an extent that one stops doing good deeds.

A person desirous of the Prophet's intercession should pray to Allah in the following words: "O Allah, accept your messenger Muhammad's (SAW) intercession in my favor."

5. To Take Oath in the Name of Anyone Besides Allah

In Sheikh's opinion it was against the essence of Tawheed to take an oath in anyone's name besides Allah. In those days this was a common practice among the Muslims. However, it is clearly stated in a Hadith in Jami Tirmidhi (one of the six authentic books of Ahadith) that taking an oath in the name of anyone besides Allah is considered Shirk. An oath is invalid if not taken in the name of Allah and therefore there is no expiation for it. This is strictly forbidden because by doing so we are honoring others besides Allah.

6. Attributes of Allah and Sheikh's Stance

There has always been a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding the interpretation of the attributes of Allah mentioned in the Holy Quran. One group totally denied the attributes of the Creator because of their likeness to His creation while the other tried to explain the attributes. For example, they explained that 'Yadullah' (Allah's hand) refers to Allah's generosity and power.

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab supported the belief of early Islamic era and classical scholars in this matter. Their view was that we should believe in the attributes of Allah in exactly the way that they have been stated in the Quran and accept them without any doubts. It is incorrect to try to interpret their exact meaning or nature or give explanations or try to probe beyond the literal meaning. Only Allah has knowledge of the real meaning and interpretation and it is the duty of a Muslim to have faith in Allah's attributes and His being without any objections.

7. Ijtihad

The Sheikh's view on Ijtihad (religious interpretation by a scholar in the light of Quran and Sunnah) is very clear. As far as beliefs and action were concerned he followed the Quran and Sunnah and the Salafi school of thought. Whereas in matters of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) he generally followed Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal but if he found an authentic Hadith in contradiction to the view of Hanbali school of thought he would never give preference to anyone's view over the Hadith.

He was greatly influenced by Imam Ibne Taymiyyah and Imam Ibne Qayyim and would base his arguments on their sayings. However, he did not bind himself by blindly following them either.

Sheikh also considered it permissible to follow different scholars and their schools of thought. However, he did not approve of prejudice and rigidity in supporting one's Imam after the clear manifestation of the truth (i-e by way of a Quranic verse or a clear-cut authentic Hadith).

Popularity of the Mission and Declaration of War Against the Movement

The supporters of the movement spread Sheikh's message across Najd, Ahsaa, Basra and all the neighboring areas. The rulers of Riyadh, Ahsaa and Qateef considered this as a warning bell for themselves. The objectives of Sheikh's message were to free human beings from the oppression of other human beings and conform to Allah's commandments. After sensing this impending danger to their power, the rulers started persecuting Sheikh's followers. The ruler of Riyadh, Daham bin Dawas, was a cruel and ruthless man. His people were helpless under his injustices. He sought pleasure in torturing and oppressing the noble and the pious. When the persecution became intolerable, Sheikh was forced to take retaliatory measures. Mohammad bin Saud, his sons and brothers thrashed the enemy with their armed forces. The armed conflict continued for a long time.

Abdul Aziz, who came to power after the death of Mohammad bin Saud, continued to fight against the enemy. For around 25 to 30 years skirmishes continued with the ruler of Riyadh. In 1187 A.H. Daham fled from Riyadh after which Sheikh and his followers took control of the area. Despite the fact that the influence of Aal-e-Saud (descendants of Saud) kept increasing in Najd and the neighboring areas, they continued to face vehement opposition. Initially the people of Najd did not even get permission to perform Hajj and relations with the ruler of Makkah remained tense. They reached a truce for sometime but this did not last long and after Sheikh's death the situation became worse. Details of this will be mentioned later.

Formation of an Islamic State

During this entire period, first Muhammad bin Saud and then his successor Abdul Aziz Muhammad bin Saud strove to establish an Islamic system of governance under the Sheikh's guidance. Sheikh would also settle all disputes as he was the chief advisor and judge to Ibne Saud. Even though he was completely occupied in Dawah work, he would continually provide guidance to help run the government according to Islamic guidelines. The family of Saud wouldn't take any step without the Sheikh's approval and consultation. Letters to rulers and nobility would be written in light of his instructions.

The foundations of the Islamic system of governance that Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab and Muhammad bin Saud formulated were based on the following guidelines:

- To call people to Allah and to implement pure Tawheed in a way that its effects would be evident in every sphere of life.
- Necessary steps should be taken by the state to ensure that the obligation of establishing prayer is fulfilled.
- Efforts should be made at a state level to fulfill the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil.

What is Islamic governance and what are the principles that it should be based on is a lengthy discussion. In short we can say that there is no difference of opinion on these basic principles. However, the methodology of implementation is very important as the noblest of causes can end in failure due to ineffective planning and wrong strategy. This rule applies even to a commendable act like establishing an Islamic state.

Sheikh's Educational Activities

Abdul Aziz Muhammad bin Saud stayed loyal to the Sheikh just like his predecessor Muhammad bin Saud. The political front

was taken care of by Abdul Aziz whilst the Sheikh continued to fulfill the responsibility of guiding the state while focusing on the religious and scholarly front to produce the required manpower. When the Sheikh successfully laid the foundation of an Islamic state and its guiding principles were seen to be implemented practically as well, he reserved himself for teaching only and handed over all other affairs to Abdul Aziz. Prior to this Sheikh had already trained hundreds of men who had spread in all areas to propagate the message of Islam and were also fully capable of running the state according to Islamic principles.

Death

Sheikh had now turned 90 years and needed to rest. The intellectual and physical struggle that he embarked upon when he was twenty years old kept him busy for the next seventy years. He fell ill in 1206 A.H. and in the month of Ziqad in 1792 A.D. he left this world for his eternal abode. The news of his death saddened his people. The sun of knowledge and action had set, but the Arabian Peninsula was shining with the light of Tawheed.

Sheikh was blessed with a long life and he put it to great use. The level of opposition and failure that he faced in his early life was compensated by Allah with the same level of success in his later years. There are not many people who gain as much popularity in their life as the Sheikh did. In addition to his own children, the term Aal-e-Sheikh (children of Sheikh) is also used to refer to his students who carried his work forward and kept his mission alive.

Effects of his Movement

The uniqueness of Sheikh's mission is the huge scale on which he prepared and trained people. The effects of his message can be felt to this day in all the places where his students and

supporters set foot. In all Muslim countries (which include Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sumatra, Nigeria and African countries) a large part of society has been influenced by Sheikh's message. In India, the roots of Syed Ahmed Shaheed's movement which initiated Jihad against the Sikhs, the Marhattas and the British can also be traced back to Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's movement.

After Sheikh's demise the family of Saud continued to achieve great success on the Dawah front but at the same time they faced severe opposition from the neighboring areas. Relations became strained and tense after the ruler of Makkah refused entry to Hajj pilgrims from Najd. In 1208 A.H. after the failure of numerous attempts at reconciliation, the commanders of Saud army marched victoriously into Makkah. They imposed restrictions on all kinds of polytheistic practices and reforms were put into place.

The Najdian rule stretched in the north from Halb to the Indian Ocean and in the east from the Persian Gulf and Iraq to Bahr e Qulzum. The Turkish Caliph Bab Aali sensed danger from the growing power of Aal-e Saud and appointed the ruler of Egypt Mohammad Ali Pasha to annihilate the people of Najd.

The Egyptian forces were continuously in conflict with Aal-e-Saud and finally in 1233 A.H. Ibrahim Pasha, the son of the Egypt ruler, attacked Dariya with a huge army. Dariya was conquered after a siege of six months and with this came the end of the first period of Aal-e-Saud's rule. The Saudi ruler (Abdullah bin Saud bin Abdul Aziz bin Mohammad bin Saud) and his men were arrested and first taken to Egypt where they were subjected to severe persecution. They were then sent to Turkey. The Saudi ruler along with his men was hanged in 1818 in the courtyard of Hagia Sophia. After ruling for three quarters of century power slipped out of the hands of the Saudis.

Since the effects of the mission were not only political but

moral and spiritual as well, there was no decline in its popularity and Aal-e- Saud started rising up again. Finally, after a struggle of around 100 years, the exiled Saudi prince Abdul Aziz bin Abdur Rahman succeeded in defeating Aal-e- Rasheed. By 1913 most part of eastern Arabia was conquered and in 1933 the whole of Hejaz and Najd was under their control. The region of Hejaz and Najd was renamed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

To this day, Sheikh's teachings are in practice in Saudi Arabia. This is experienced by every person who travels there with the intention of Hajj or Umrah. The excellent results achieved by the Saudi government as a result of following Sheikh's guidance are evident to everyone. The exemplary establishment of prayer is one such reward. A point to be noted here is that establishing prayer, enjoining good and forbidding evil are not the only things that are essential in an Islamic state. Other basic requirements are provision of justice for all, freedom of expression and a simple lifestyle of the ruling class. One cannot claim to have established an Islamic state by disregarding any of the above requirements. The Saudi government should pay due attention to this aspect as well.

We know that the rightly guided caliphs would include the society's noblest people in their consultations. The system was neither dictatorship nor today's democracy. The wise and honorable people of the society were considered capable of running the affairs of the state on the right principles. Justice prevailed to the extent that the ruling class was answerable in their matters more than the common people. A golden example is that of caliph Umar (RA) who was even questioned about the garments covering his body, at a time when he was ruling the ever expanding Muslim empire. Another shining example is when caliph Ali (RA) presented himself in a court with his opponent and he ended up losing the case.

Freedom of expression is every individual's basic birthright and

forcing every individual to conform to the views of the government in everything is not in line with the spirit of Islam. An ordinary woman advised caliph Umar (RA) during law-making by reminding him of a verse of the Holy Quran. After realizing that there was weight in what she was saying, he accepted and appreciated her advice. On the other hand, the affairs of Muslim states are in front of everyone. They do not even come up to the contemporary western standards – let alone the superior standards set by Islam.

Any government that claims to be an Islamic one must ensure that its ruling class leads a simple life conforming to the laws and spirit of Shariah. Contrary to this it is not becoming for the descendants of Sheikh or Saud to lead a life of indulgence in luxurious palaces, to travel in expensive cars with armies of servants making way for them and be followed by cars and motorcycles with blaring hooters and sirens, to have intoxicated gait, drunken eyes and long cloaks (a sign of pride). It is incumbent upon those who want to adopt and implement the Shariah brought by Allah's messenger to reform themselves and change their behavior.

Objections

Even though Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's movement received an incredible level of support and recognition, it is also a movement in the Islamic world that both Muslims and non-Muslims have tried to discredit in every possible way. The uproar created by the British, Turks and Egyptians made it seem as if this was a different religion from Islam. We will now mention some of the objections that were raised against the movement from time to time.

1. Wahabism...a Sect or a Different Religion?

The movement that reverted people back to the pure teachings of Islam was given the name of 'Wahabism' and the word

'Wahabi' started being used as a curse. An important point is that the founder of the movement was Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, and if the origins of the movement are to be traced back to him then the movement should have been called the 'Muhammadi Movement'. However, such a name would not cause any defamation to the movement. Therefore, the name was attributed to Sheikh's father Abdul Wahab and the term 'Wahabi' was popularized. To this day, Sheikh's followers are known by this name. As such, Wahab is one of the names of Allah and no one can have any objection in being associated with this name. However, Wahabism was made popular in a way that it appeared as a religion that was different from Islam. Regardless of the source of this malicious slander, the fact is that the British capitalized on the situation and vilified this name for their vested interests.

2. Denial of Sunnah

One of the things said against Sheikh and his teachings was that they were against the Sunnah (teachings of the Prophet). In addition to rejecting Hadith he was also accused of being an enemy of the Prophet and his family (Ahl e Bayt), and that he forbade the sending of salutation on the Prophet (SAW). Masood Alam Nadvi expresses his surprise at this allegation in the following words: “The peculiarity of the world is worth seeing. A person whose every action in life is dictated by the Sunnah of the Prophet is accused of denouncing Hadith.”

We answer this accusation from one of Sheikh's writings: “Tell my adversaries that it is incumbent upon everyone to lead their lives according to the legacy of the Prophet (SAW). I tell you that my books are with you; study them. Do not follow what I say. However, you should obey the Prophet's commandments which are present in your books too. Is it correct to call someone a Muslim if he holds animosity towards the Prophet (SAW) who gifted us with the guidance of the true religion?”

What the Sheikh forbade people from was showing excessive devotion to prophets and righteous people that could lead them to Shirk (polytheism). As we know, Shirk is no ordinary sin. It can lead a person into hellfire and expulsion from the fold of Islam.

3. Derogatory Attitude Towards Other Muslims

Another allegation against the Sheikh was that he considered everyone an infidel except his followers and himself. It was believed that he was of the view that whoever did not obey him was out of the fold of Islam and that it was permissible to take his life and property.

It is not enough to say that this is a mere allegation. The truth regarding this matter is that according to the Sheikh if a person does not leave polytheistic practices and grave worship after accepting Islam then he is a Mushrik (polytheist). His logic was that even in the days of ignorance people considered Allah to be the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. However, they would include partners in their invocations, Tawaf (circumambulation around the Kaaba) and sacrifice. Therefore, by using the terms Waseelah (intercession) and Shafa'at (mediation) we cannot change the truth regarding Kufr (disbelief).

Despite the fact that the Sheikh considered all these practices as Shirk, he considered it obligatory to first educate those with such beliefs before declaring them infidels. However, if anyone persisted in his polytheistic beliefs or practices after the clear manifestation of the truth, then the Sheikh would consider him an infidel. He never initiated any attack on these people. However, when conflict was imposed upon him he reciprocated by fighting the enemy. It is very clear that the Sheikh did not generalize in censuring the Muslims of the world, a fact which he stated repeatedly. However, what can one do if someone wants to lay accusations out of sheer obstinacy?

It is also said that he considered it permissible to wage war against those who renounced Salah (prayer). The truth is that it is a much publicized issue from the Hanbali school of thought and this remains the practice of the Hanbalis. Since Sheikh and the people of Najd followed the Hanbali school of thought in most issues, according to them a person who forsakes prayer is a Kafir (infidel).

4. Demolition of Graves

Sheikh and his followers demolished the shrines and graves that were revered and worshipped by the people. The reason was that building concrete graves or grand shrines on them is prohibited in Islam as these practices open the doors to Shirk (polytheism). This was the basis of Sheikh's decision of ordering the demolition. However, he considered it an approved and recommended act to visit the holy grave of the Prophet (SAW).

5. Extremism in Religion

Sheikh ul Islam and his disciples are accused of being rigid and extreme in their teachings of Islam. Although the Sheikh repeatedly instructed his students and supporters not to be rigid as it leads to dissension which is disapproved in Islam, no one can deny the fact that some of his disciples were rigid and a demonstration of this can be seen in the present Saudi society. Here it is essential to understand a fact that in the beginning all the movements are in their original form. With time as different kinds of people join in, their lack of proper upbringing and excessive enthusiasm leads them to do undesirable things, bringing a bad name for the movement.

In this matter it is necessary to mention the personality of our beloved Prophet (SAW). No one could be a bigger advocate of Tawheed (monotheism) than the Prophet (SAW). Yet even his enemies could not accuse him of being harsh and extreme. He

put an end to idolatry and demolished the idols and still got the title of mercy to mankind. This is not a contradiction. It is one thing to have unwavering belief in one's mission and another to criticize others over every small issue due to a sense of superiority. The former is recommended while the latter is disliked.

We should remember that guidance is from Allah and man cannot become guided by himself. The Holy Quran tells us that the dwellers of paradise will testify to this truth in the following words: “All praises is due to Allah who guided us to this. And we would not have found the way if Allah had not guided us.” (7:43)

Similarly, it is totally against the etiquettes of preaching Islam to pass judgments of Haram (forbidden) in every little matter and to make people feel that they are spending a major part of their day in forbidden activities. The following Hadith is a beacon of light for us in this matter: “Make things easy and do not make them difficult, and give glad tidings and do not make people runaway.” (Bukhari)

The Sheikh's Personality

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab's personality was in perfect harmony with his work. Along with his humbleness his dignified mannerisms were also noticeable. His presence was overwhelming for the people around him; whether he was silent or addressing them. He exercised great caution in his speech and disliked indecent words and pretentious talk. Although he was a very simple man, he paid great attention to hygiene and cleanliness. People would get impressed by him and would agree to listen to him as they could sense sincerity in his words. His entire life's hard work and struggle was the proof behind this.

One of his redeeming qualities was his bravery. When he

considered something correct he had no hesitation in propagating and preaching it nor did he ever let any motive or reason come in the way. He was stoned, sent into exile and even migrated for his cause. However, no ruler or pseudo scholar or ignorant member of the public could stop him from stating the truth nor could their hatred become a hurdle in his path.

In the words of Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

What befalls all travelers on that road befell me,
a solitary prison cell, my name ridiculed in the market;
self-anointed holy men from their pulpits thundered,
dictators roared from their seats of power.
No treacherous arrows were spared me by strangers,
no scorn was omitted by those most esteemed,
but my heart feels shame neither for this love nor that love;
there is every scar on this heart but the scar of shame.

Sheikh had a passion and he accomplished it in a remarkable manner. For seventy years he strove for it by taking up the roles of a mujahid, preacher and writer. Sheikh did not want to see the truth to be concealed, struggling and lifeless; he wanted to see it victorious, honored and practically applied in everyday lives. One cannot imagine Islam without honor and grandeur. His early experiences taught him that if the ruling class accepts the truth, then the struggle in Allah's path can be fruitful in this world as well in the form of an Islamic state. It can be said that it was Sheikh's good fortune that he received tremendous support from the rulers of Al-e-Saud.

Sheikh's sincerity and selflessness was a very important factor behind his alliance with the Saudi rulers. If he desired he could have amassed wealth and seized power himself or could have demanded property and positions of power for his children. But the Sheikh had different motivations. He used to provide food, clothing and accommodation for the needy students from his own earnings. He would not put the burden on the state treasury

and even took loans to bear these expenses. These loans would be paid off from the money provided for Dawah activities. When Sheikh died he did not have even a dirham to his name. In fact he had a debt of thousands of pounds which was later paid off by Ibne Saud.

In addition to possessing the qualities of dignity, bravery, generosity, contentment and critical thinking, he was blessed with the admirable qualities of forbearance and forgiveness. Despite being a religious scholar Sheikh's brother Suleiman bin Abdul Wahab was jealous of his popularity. He would spread slander against the Sheikh in the whole of Hejaz. The extent of his opposition reached a point that he even wrote a book against his brother in which he called the Sheikh an ignorant and imprudent person. On the other hand, Sheikh wrote to him many times and tried his level best to convince him. After some time when he realized his mistake he came to apologize to the Sheikh who was overjoyed to see his brother in front of him. Despite hearing words like misguided and liar about himself, he still embraced his brother.

Apart from his brother, innumerable people who had not left any stone unturned in his enmity started coming to him one by one. Sheikh would overlook their mistakes and include them in his group. Sheikh's mission was not focused on his own self but was for the sake of Allah. Therefore, the basis of friendship and enmity was never his own personality.

Sheikh's life is a model and example for every seeker of truth. His deep study of the Quran and Hadith at an early age enabled him to see the reality of both truth and falsehood. He saw the reign of falsehood and ignorance everywhere. Like many other scholars he could have also turned a blind eye to this and taken up the position of a preacher, concealed the crimes of the rulers and led a peaceful existence. He could have also taken refuge somewhere from the deceptions and allurements of the world. Instead, he chose to undertake the grand task of preparing a new

era, a new world and new people. To serve one true God meant denouncing thousands of false gods and Sheikh chose this thorny path for himself.

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